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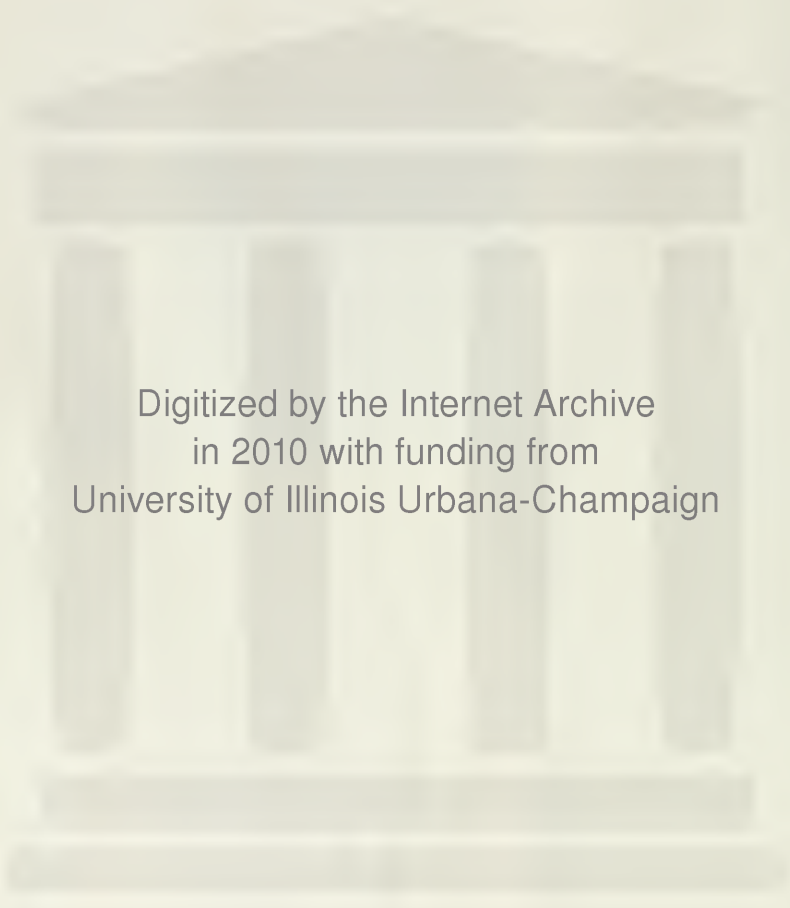
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THE METROPOLITAN SOCIAL INVENTORY:
PROCEDURES FOR MEASURING HUMAN WELL-BEING IN URBAN AREAS
(thesis abstract and bibliography)

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Bibliography

Federal Documents

Books

Articles in Periodicals and Annuals

Reports

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Introduction

The Metropolitan Social Inventory is an assemblage of information that measures or facilitates the measurement of the condition of human well-being in metropolitan regions on a continuing basis. This thesis proposes the procedures, i.e., the general content and basic methodologies, to be used in the Metropolitan Social Inventory.

The Inventory is a basic technique of urban and regional planners. An inventory of the current situation can help the planner make decisions about the future, especially if a similar inventory has been repeated at several points in time. The inventory technique has been adapted to the analysis of the physical elements of the community such as land use, physical resources, community facilities, and housing conditions. This thesis proposes that the inventory technique be adapted to the human element of the community in the form of a "Metropolitan Social Inventory."

A "social inventory" is defined as the assemblage of information that measures or facilitates the measurement of the condition of human well-being of a defined population within a given society, delineated spatial unit, and specific time period.

"Human well-being" is defined as the welfare of all persons who comprise the resident population of the metropolitan region, sub-metropolitan areas, or subgroups of these populations; the scope of collective personal welfare is limited to those types of human well-being that are (1) the responsibility of a developed society, (2) affected by the policies adopted by societal institutions, (e.g., governmental units, private firms, voluntary organizations), (3) subject to evaluation by a social preference scale (i.e., an evaluative scale based on, among other things, value judgments and ethical judgments), (4) identifiable with certain common characteristics and/or behavioral patterns, and (5) capable of measurement.

This thesis is limited to proposing social inventory procedures for metropolitan regions. The measurement of economic condition indicators or physical development condition indicators in the metropolitan region is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The separation of social indicators from economic and physical indicators is not as clear cut as it may appear; there are certain indicators that overlap more than one of these three basic categories. For instance, the economic indicators of personal income and employment by occupation (skill level), are also indicators of human well-being. These overlapping indicators are included within the scope of this thesis.

The Metropolitan Social Inventory (MSI) has numerous uses in the social development planning aspect of comprehensive planning. Recently, the planning profession has broadened its perspective from physical planning to planning for social development and economic development as well as physical development.

The information available from the MSI could be used as an input to comprehensive middle-range and long-range planning in the public sector. Current and past cross sections of information could provide the human well-being informational input for a wide variety of middle-range planning decisions. One example of this is the use of Inventory information in a capital improvements program.

MSI information could be used in almost every phase of the long-range, comprehensive planning process designed to prepare future development schemes for a metropolitan region. A regional development scheme should include sets of complementary social development programs, economic development programs, and physical development plans.

The scope of the MSI is established by the categories of human well-being utilized. The categories proposed in this thesis as well as some examples of human well-being indicators are as follows:

HEALTH

Major Disease Rate
Suicide Rate

MATERIAL PROVISION

Median Family Income
Percentage of Families Self-supporting

OPPORTUNITY

Housing Availability Rate
Pupil-Teacher Ratio

RECREATION

Entertainment Patronage Rate
Rate of Borrowing from the Public Library

Safety

Crime Rate for Crimes of Violence
Major Fires per Capita

STATUS

Median Level of Educational Attainment
Percentage of Workers in Skilled Occupations

The preferred organizational location of the MSI in metropolitan institutions is within a central clearing house for a wide variety of socio-economic-physical information -- a metropolitan information center. The MSI is the social inventory component of this center that is designed to serve a wide variety of both public and private users.

The MSI process is a continuing process involving the four basic operations of collection, storage and retrieval, processing, and dissemination of information relevant to the condition of human well-being in the metropolitan region.

The informational inputs to the MSI process are available indicators and data bits plus original data bits gathered specifically for the MSI. The informational outputs of the MSI process are regularly issued reports (including a comprehensive catalog of the contents of the MSI) and replies to special requests for information. Also, the MSI maintenance staff can provide technical advisory assistance in matters relating to human well-being information. The MSI process is an information management process. It is neither analytical nor decisional; its function is to provide an informational base, within the constraints of the confidentiality of certain information, for decision making by others.

The MSI contains current indicators and data bits, cross sections of these two types of information at past points in time, and supplemental information (e.g., technical interpretative information, published and unpublished studies relating to human well-being, and any other pertinent information not recorded elsewhere in the MSI).

The lack of an external guide, i.e., outside the MSI, to the direction and general magnitude of change in the condition of human well-being leaves the staff operating the MSI in an unfortunate position. The staff must evaluate whether a change is truly the result of changing conditions of well-being or the result of a wrong choice of data, improper collection of the data, or incorrect manipulation without the aid of an external check on the condition of human well-being. The use of a large number of indicators in the MSI helps in the task of cross checking the MSI procedures but the staff must still rely heavily on intuition and a few statistical reliability tests.

The MSI maintenance staff or the metropolitan information center staff (if in existence) would be subject to significant political pressures. The control of information and how it is reported is a very powerful political tool. There could be pressure on the staff to report potentially embarrassing information about political group A by group B, while group A might apply pressure to suppress the same information.

Certain users of the MSI could draw unjustified conclusions from the reported information. The users should remember that the MSI can measure only the human well-being consequence of all results of the total cumulative set of decisions and actions. Urban areas are complex interdependent systems; therefore, it is impossible to attribute certain consequences solely to specific decisions and actions such as those associated with urban renewal or the "war on poverty."

The value of MSI information is gauged by the quality of the procedures used to measure human well-being and, ultimately, by the amount of assistance provided decision makers. The greater the involvement of the entire range of decision makers in the establishment of MSI content and methodologies is, the greater will be the resulting usefulness of this tool to decision makers. The degree of sophistication of the data processing hardware utilized is relevant only to the extent that it can provide improved procedures and better services to decision makers.

The ability to adjust the content and methodologies of the MSI is very important. Current knowledge on measuring the condition of human well-being is very limited and future studies, no doubt, will provide innovations in measurement procedures. The MSI is being proposed during what is sometimes referred to as the "information explosion"; increasingly, data of all types are becoming available. The users and their requirements for information are in a constant stage of change. Given this dynamic situation, the MSI must be capable of adjustment without significantly diminishing the uniformity of its measurements over time.

In order to help achieve comparability of MSI information in different metropolitan regions, uniform procedures should be used in each MSI that is established. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in combination with the Department of Housing and Urban Development might provide an appropriate vehicle for achieving this end.

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